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## IMMIGRATION FROM ITALY.

BY DR. J. H. SENNER, U. S. COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION.

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IF the expressions of the press be any indication of public opinion, the heavy immigration from Italy during the last six weeks has irritated the American people to a great degree. The "Little Italy" of Ellis Island has enjoyed, from the pictorial standpoint, as well as from the reportorial and editorial ones, an unusual amount of attention, although it did not realize the sensational newspaper anticipations of riots, epidemics, wholesale escapes, fusilades, and similar occurrences. Innocent readers of our daily papers must have come to the conclusion that the immigration from Italy was not only unprecedented in numbers but also extraordinarily undesirable in character, and that therefore the most heroic measures were demanded by the public welfare. The assumed conditions, however, have differed widely from the real ones. To dispel the notion that this year's influx is unusually large, I need but refer to the facts that immigration from Italy to the United States amounted in the fiscal year 1887-8 to 47,622, in 1888-9 to 51,558, in 1889-90 to 52,003, in 1890-91 to 76,055, in 1891-2 to 61,631, in 1892-3 to 69,437, the largest part of which in each year was crowded into the spring months.

It is quite true that this year's immigration from Italy exceeds that of the two preceding fiscal years, 1893-4 and 1894-5, of 42,074 and 33,902, respectively; but during that period the tide of all commerce was exceptionally low and immigration was likewise naturally affected. These years cannot, therefore, properly be taken as a basis for comparisons. It is also true that since about the middle of March there have been detained at this port an unprecedented number of immigrants, either for special examination or for deportation, but this condition was not due to any unusual undesirability on the part of these immigrants, but

solely to the strict enforcement of the latest law (of March 3, 1893), which made it the duty of the Inspectors of the Immigration Service to detain for special inquiry every immigrant who was not clearly and beyond doubt entitled to admission. That it has been possible, with a very small force of available employees, to preserve order and peace to the fullest degree upon Ellis Island, although as many as 1,020 immigrants, of whom over 500 were sentenced to deportation, have been detained over night, is convincing proof at least of the fact that the Italians, who form the largest percentage of the detained, are by no means as unruly, violent, dangerous, or anarchistic as they have been assumed to be by the imaginative newsgatherers of the public press.

The Italians only, of all the Latin peoples, developed a tendency to migration almost equal to that of the Anglo-Saxons. The history of the peninsula for more than two thousand years past, with the enormous invasions of Germanic tribes, may perhaps furnish an explanation of this phenomenon. Emigration of Italians to the Western Continent on a larger scale only became possible with the great development of oceanic steamship service in the last few decades, and until a very recent date such immigration into the United States was very much smaller than that into the southern part of the Western Continent, especially the Argentine Republic. But while the tendency to migration may be inborn in nations, it can never come into practical operation but by urgent reasons based upon political or commercial conditions. Poor Italy had suffered perpetually from misrule and bloody wars and consequent commercial depression. United Italy, only a little more than a quarter of a century in existence, could not as yet succeed in securing safety, peace, and welfare to her subjects. Unsettled in her finances, under the bane of a violent conflict with her church, with the pretensions of a great power, but without means to bear the burdens of her ambition, she furnished the basis of a large emigration. Her government, absolutely unable to offset the disturbances of the political and financial welfare of her subjects, refrained from opposing such emigration, and has even seemingly favored it.

For a good many years this policy of the Italian Government seemed to produce advantageous results to the prosperity of Italy. As long as the migration to and fro was entirely unrestricted, Italians in large numbers were in the habit of crossing

and recrossing the ocean, some as many as ten times, as so-called "birds of passage," and taking out of the United States, or other countries of America, the gains which their standard of living, far below that of an American wage earner, made it easy for them to accumulate. The amount of money annually sent home by Italian laborers or taken back by them has been conservatively estimated at from \$4,000,000 to even \$30,000,000. Commissioner-General Stump observed, during his trip abroad as Chairman of the Immigration Investigating Commission, that "the marked increase in the wealth of certain sections of Italy can be traced directly to the money earned in the United States." But these advantages to the old country are about to cease definitely. The rigid enforcement of the Federal statutes since 1893 by the United States Immigration Officials has made it very hard for Italian "birds of passage" to come and go at their pleasure. Besides, quite a large proportion of those who originally came to the United States with no intention of acquiring residence, found the country so advantageous and congenial to them that they changed their minds, sent for their families and settled permanently within the United States, acquiring, in time, rights of citizenship.

Italian immigrants, even in the first generation, succumb sooner or later, like those of other European nationalities, to the irresistible influence of freedom and prosperity; while in the second generation, as a rule, and in the third invariably, they become thoroughly Americanized.

The eleventh census of 1890 gives the number of foreign born Italians living in the United States as 182,580. According to the statistics of immigration the total number of immigrants from Italy from 1873 to 1890 amounted to not less than 356,062,\* which clearly shows how large the migratory movement must have been at that time, since the number who arrived during the eighteen years prior to 1890 was nearly twice as large as the number of foreign born Italians living in the United States on the 1st of June, 1890.

\* The absolute unreliability of old statistics as to all, and especially Italian, immigration is best shown by the fact that while the official statistics (Report of the Superintendent of Immigration for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1892), represent the total Italian immigration from 1873 to 1890 as 356,062, the same official report (pp. 14, 15, etc.) states the number of Italian immigrants from 1881 to 1889 as 307,309, which figure would increase the total for 1873 to 1890 by not less than 52,012. Nevertheless, it has always been these same statistics on which our legislators as well as scientists have based their conclusions.

It was only about the 1st of July, 1893, that, finding such a marked discrepancy between the statistics of the Immigration Service and the United States census of 1890, I directed the statisticians at Ellis Island, thenceforth, to specify accurately as to every immigrant whether or not he had been in the United States before. The result clearly demonstrated that about 20 per cent. of the Italians arriving at this port had been previously in the United States, and therefore could not properly be counted again as immigrants. Of the 94,700 Italians landed in New York from the 1st of July, 1893, to the end of 1895, no less than 21,692 had been in the United States before. It is a remarkable fact that the percentage of returning immigrants to the total immigration is almost continually on the increase. Of 15,706 arrivals from July 1 to December 31, 1893, those returning numbered only 2,011; of 10,355 for the same period in 1894, 2,196; while of the 18,724 who arrived during the same months of 1895, 4,190 had been here before.

That Italian immigrants are abandoning their habit of migration to and fro, and are inclining more and more to definite settlement in this country, is further proved by the following facts. Of the total Italian immigration from 1881 to 1889, amounting to 307,309 (according to the report of Superintendent Owen for the year 1892) only 63,386, or 20.6 per cent., were females, and 47,063, or 15.3 per cent., were under fifteen years of age. In the fiscal year 1893-4, the proportion of females to the total Italian immigration rose to 24.12 per cent., and of children under fifteen years of age to 16.08 per cent. The year 1894-5 shows 27.42 per cent. females and 17.4 per cent. children. The period from July 1, 1895, to the 1st of April, 1896 (the statistics for April not being complete at the time of this writing), shows not less than 30.2 per cent. of females and 19.42 per cent. of children under fifteen years of age. The increasing tendency of Italian immigrants to definite settlement is furthermore proved by the systematic statistics kept at the port of New York since the 1st of July, 1893, as to the number of persons who arrived here to join members of their immediate families; only parents, children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters are included in these statistics, while more distant relatives or connections, such as uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, are not considered. Only the reunions of temporarily

separated families are placed in this category. Congress cannot justly undertake to force out of this country aliens who have legitimately settled in it, or to prevent their immediate families, unless objectionable *per se*, from joining them in this country.

The statistics carefully prepared at this station reveal the astonishing fact that, of some 94,700 Italians who arrived at this port from July 1, 1893, to the end of December, 1895, no less than 33,625 came to join members of their immediate families. If we add this number to the 21,692 above mentioned who had been in the United States before, we get a total of 55,317, or 58 per cent. of the total Italian immigration, leaving but 39,383 immigrants proper. During the same period of two and a half years, as I have reliably ascertained from the steamship companies, no less than 62,678 persons, almost exclusively alien residents, left the United States in the steerage for Italian ports. Thus, practically, the number of outgoing Italians exceeded the number of new arrivals by more than 25,000 in the time prior to the alleged extraordinary and appalling recent rush of immigrants from Italy.

Let us now look at the actual figures in respect to this immigration. Since the 1st of January, 1896, there have arrived at New York, which is the principal port of entry for Italians :

	Males.	Females.	Total.
January.....	1,316	666	1,982
February.....	999	645	1,644
March.....	7,882	1,436	9,320
April.....	12,016	2,187	14,203

An analysis of these figures, dividing them into the two categories mentioned above—(1) Those who had been in the United States before ; and (2) those who came to join their immediate families—furnishes the following interesting results :

1896.	Total Italian immigration.	In U. S. before.	Joining immediate families.	Balance.
January.....	1,982	359	705	918
February.....	1,644	611	937	96
March.....	9,320	2,445	2,033	4,842
April.....	14,203	3,533	3,291	7,379
Total.....	27,149	6,948	6,966	13,235

In the face of this petty aggregate, which is less than one half of the excess of the Italian exodus from this country during the preceding two and a half years, it is assumed that the great United States of America, with a population of about 70,000,000,

are forced to heroic preventive measures ! *Tant de bruit pour une omelette !*

There is no likelihood whatever of any considerable increase in these figures during the current fiscal year or even at any later period. In fact, before these words appear in print, the spring immigration of 1896 will have been finished, and I do not hesitate to predict, as to the future, that the very faithful enforcement of the law, during this season of Italian immigration, will produce all the desired effects. If, in addition to the present law, a moderate educational test should be introduced by Congress, even the remotest apprehension of danger from Italian immigration would be forever removed, so long as the enforcement of our immigration laws keeps pace with their letter and spirit. I may be pardoned for here repeating what is a matter of record in the report of the Immigration Investigating Commission, of which I am a member, that I am most heartily in favor of a reasonable and practicable educational test for male immigrants over 16 years of age, excepting those who come here to join their immediate families. I do not share the apprehensions of the distinguished and learned Senator from Massachusetts, who is at present Chairman of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, that "a great, a perilous change in the very fabric of our race" is impending from further immigration. The evil done in that direction, prior to the law of 1893 and its strict enforcement under the present administration, can, of course, never be undone ; the nation can now secure self-protection from the effects of the heterogeneous influx during fifteen years prior to 1893 only by a wholesome restriction of the privilege of naturalization. But I can safely say that since the enactment of the law of 1893 no substantial number of undesirable immigrants have been permitted to enter the United States, and that our public charitable and penal institutions have not been materially burdened with the care of such immigrations. It is well known that our immigration laws offer the fullest opportunity to any community or public institution burdened with immigrants who have become public charges within one year after landing, to rid themselves of them. If an immigrant become a public charge from causes prior to landing, the steamship companies are compelled to deport him ; and the immigrant fund bears the expense of transportation in all cases where the perma-

nent inability to earn a living arose after the time of landing. Notwithstanding the fact that these laws and regulations have been made more widely known all over the country during the last three years than ever before, the number of persons returned within one year after landing as public charges decreased from 637, in the fiscal year 1892, to 577 in 1893, 417 in 1894, and 177 in 1895. This is self-evident proof of the increasing efficiency of the immigration service in preventing from year to year undesirable immigrants from landing.

Those landed were most likely to assimilate quickly to the, American people and their national institutions. Indeed serious consideration of the ability of immigrants to assimilate readily has been always predominant with the Board of Special Inquiry, under my supervision at Ellis Island. The likelihood of assimilation necessarily constitutes an important factor, in the decision by such a Board, of an immigrant's eligibility to land on our shores, and this likelihood is judged in the light of the comparative readiness, as shown by experience, with which immigrants from the various foreign countries assume the duties of citizenship and acquire the English tongue.

Illiteracy, though at present no specific reason for excluding an immigrant, is nevertheless carefully considered as a factor in all cases; although it should be stated that some of the most objectionable immigrants have been persons well able to read and write. My principal reason for favoring a moderate educational test is the obvious fact that illiteracy is invariably coupled with a low standard of living which leads to a lowering of wages.

The common opinion as to the inability of Italian immigrants to assimilate is, I am frank to state, not shared by me. It must be admitted that Italians who come over in mature years, without education even in their own language, and during their sojourn in the United States move almost exclusively among their countrymen, find it exceedingly difficult to acquire even the rudiments of the national language; but such is the common experience with most other non-English speaking immigrants as well. On the other hand, we find that an Italian who has come here younger in years, or who has received a good education, becomes speedily a thorough American, even if his occupation brings him into contact mostly with his own countrymen. And children born in this country of Italian parents can scarcely be distinguished



by their speech or their habits from the children of native Americans. The public schools of New York bear testimony to this statement. The Rev. Bonaventure Piscopo, of the Church of the Most Precious Blood (the largest Italian Roman Catholic Parish in the City of New York), is my authority for the statement that all the Italian priests, in their religious services, their Sunday schools, and even in their confessionals, are obliged to use the English if they hope to be understood at all by the second generation. The same priest related to me the story of a boy of eighteen, born in Italy, but brought to this country when fourteen months of age, by the name of Gian-Battista Foppiano, whose parents left Boston some years ago to return to their native town, Ciccagna, in the province of Genoa. The lad entreated his parents in vain to return to America. He also wrote most urgent and pathetic letters to some of his boy companions in America to send him money. They did so, and he tried to return to the United States against the will of his parents, but did not succeed. The poor boy became so homesick for the United States that he fell into melancholy, and can now be seen in the insane asylum of Genoa, longing for the United States. If this pathetic story cannot be taken as proof of the devotion of all young Italians to this country, it at least illustrates how erroneous are the sweeping assertions sometimes made to the contrary.

It would be an easy thing, of course, to exclude all migration from Italy by the enactment of restrictive measures which would be substantially prohibitory; but the quality of such statesmanship may well be seriously doubted. Despots indulge in radical measures, without regard to consequences, and with no other consideration than their own personal pleasure and comfort. Patriotic statesmen, on the other hand, must not hesitate to face every problem, to study it carefully and to try to find the best possible solution. The United States of America are, in my sincere conviction, not yet ripe, and will not be for a long period of years, to exclude any immigrants who are not really undesirable. The Immigration Investigating Commission very properly said in their report that an entire closing of our ports to immigrants would inevitably result in untold injury to, if not in the very annihilation of, our largest transportation and manufacturing enterprises, in a disastrous stoppage in the development of great sections of the country and in a famine of

servants and menial laborers. Italians, as a nationality, certainly do not belong *per se* to an undesirable class of immigrants. There are vast regions in the South and West and on the Pacific coast for the colonization of which they are unquestionably and pre-eminently adapted, and as manual laborers for many varieties of work which Anglo-Saxons are very loth to undertake they are beyond a doubt excellently fitted.

If they are hired out in large masses by unscrupulous padrones, let the padrone system be fought and suppressed. If they are uneducated, let our public schools take care of them. If some are afraid of their voting power, on account of their ignorance—an assumption, by the way, which is rather curious in a country with millions of negro voters—let the United States restrict their naturalization. If we do not want to receive absolute illiterates, let us exclude them by a reasonable test, but without separating families, parts of which may be already here. Let us in general exclude all undesirables, whether they are of Italian or any other nationality, but let us beware, most of all, of dangerous and thoughtless generalities which are based only on the ignorance of facts.

Since I became acquainted more fully with the many questions pertaining to immigration by actual and practical experience at this most important port of the United States, I have come to the conclusion that the final solution of the “immigration problem” is not to be found in the application to immigrants of any additional test of eligibility, but in a wise distribution of the desirable immigrants among the localities where they are especially needed and their employment in the kinds of work for which they are peculiarly fitted. A National Land and Labor Clearing House, to be established in connection with the great immigrant station at Ellis Island, with branches at the other stations, would, in my opinion, if properly conducted, prevent all possible dangers from immigration, and at the same time give this great nation all the benefits for the future which it has unquestionably derived from immigration in the past. The adoption of such a plan would also solve once for all the problem as to the immigration from Italy.

J. H. SENNER.